

Municipality of West Perth

2022 Municipal Election Accessibility Plan



September 28, 2022

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Introduction

The Accessibility Plan will address the specific accessibility requirements in relation to the 2022 Municipal and School Board Election in the Municipality of West Perth.

The Municipality of West Perth has made great efforts in promoting a barrier free community. To ensure that the 2022 Municipal Election is consistent with the core principles of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA)*, this planning document was developed in advance of the election in order to identify measures to be taken during the Election process and to be reported to Council following the Election.

Objectives

This plan is intended to highlight measures that the Municipality of West Perth will implement to ensure equal opportunity for all electors and candidates. These objectives include:

- That persons with disabilities are able to independently cast their vote and verify their selection.
- That persons with disabilities have full and equal access to all information on where and when to vote and on eligible candidates.
- That persons with disabilities can fully participate in the Municipal Election as an elector, candidate, or election official.
- That efforts are made to ensure that electors with disabilities are aware of the accessibility measures available via channels such as the newspaper, media launches, the Municipality of West Perth's website and social media.
- That the voter assistance centre is accessible

Development of the Plan

This plan is a "living" document which will be improved and updated as best practices are identified and new opportunities for improvement arise. In order to develop the plan below, several steps were taken to ensure that statutory requirements were met, and a feasible implementation plan was in place. During the development of the 2022 Municipal Election Accessibility Plan, the following steps shall be implemented:

- Review and analysis of documents, policies and other supporting materials from AMCTO, neighbouring municipalities, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, technology suppliers and other various stakeholder groups.
- Establish staff training standards and practices directly related to the Election to ensure that people with disabilities are able to vote in a positive customer service environment and ensure that all Election Officials recognize that a voter's needs shall be accommodated.

Voting Methods

For the 2022 Municipal and School Board Election the Municipality will be working with Voatz to provide to eligible voters, internet voting and telephone voting. This approach to voting methods includes the convenience and independence of voting from anywhere via internet or the telephone.

Everyday tools like computers, phones and other aids can present accessible opportunities for persons with disabilities to accomplish more, while being consistent with the principles of independence, dignity, integration and equal opportunity.

Internet Voting

The Voatz system provides voters with the capability to vote from the comfort of their own home through internet voting. Voting from home facilitates the voting process for persons with disabilities who may have mobility restrictions, visual impairment, and/or have a difficult time with transportation.

Additionally, persons who have assistive devices set up in their homes can now use them to assist with casting a ballot privately and independently.

By allowing persons with disabilities to vote from any location and from a selection of methods, there is an increase in the capability for the voter to vote without any assistance. This provides persons with disabilities the same independence and privacy in participating in the election as other voters.

Eligible voters may vote online, using a smart phone, tablet device, gaming device or computer and any accompanying assistive devices or software, along with their PIN and other qualifying information (i.e. possibly date of birth) to access the internet address provided in their Voter Instruction Letter.

For those individuals without means to access voting via the internet from the comfort of their own home, or who require the assistance of a trained Election Official, the voter assistance centre will also be equipped with areas for in-person internet voting opportunities via a laptop or tablet.

The Voatz system has been created to meet the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG-2 Level AA), so that persons with disabilities can perceive, understand, navigate and interact with the online voting system. It is compliant with the guidelines of the World Wide Web Consortium website principles, which include organization, functionality and readability of information provided, as well as alternative ways of representing information, such as with audio.

Voter assistance centre

Voter assistance centre will be equipped to facilitate in-person internet voting using a laptop or tablet. An accessibility assessment of each physical voting location will be conducted. The following considerations are taken into account when

determining which location(s) will be used. For the purpose of this plan, the voting location includes the exterior parking and walkways associated with the location. The voting locations will be advertised on the Municipality of West Perth website, social media accounts, and in the local newspapers.

Accessible Route to Entrance and Exit

The route to the entrance of the voter assistance centre shall be unobstructed and accessible. The route shall be wide enough to allow for an individual using a wheelchair, mobile equipment, other assistive device, or service animal to travel safely. An easily navigable route will be marked for entry into the voting location and into the voting area within the location. The voting area will be identified with clear and understandable signage.

Doors into the voter assistance centre shall be accessible and easy to open or shall remain propped open for the duration of the voter assistance centre hours. Routine checks of entrance and exit routes will be made throughout the hours of operation.

Parking

Accessible parking shall be available at the voter assistance centre. The designated parking space(s) shall be clearly marked with the International Accessibility Symbol and will be on firm and level ground, close to the entrance of the voter assistance centre. Routine checks will be made to ensure all entrances remain barrier free through the course of the day.

Interior Voting Area

Access to the interior Voting Area will be level and easily traversed. Any doormats or carpeting will be level with the floor to prevent potential tripping hazards. All voting areas are to be well lit, and seating will be made available

Voting Assistance

Support Person/Friend of the Voter

Pursuant to the Municipality of West Perth Accessible Customer Service Policy, people with disabilities shall be permitted to be accompanied by a support person at any voting location. A designated support person will be administered an oath of secrecy/confidentiality by an Election Official prior to providing any such assistance.

Service Animals

Pursuant to the Joint Accountability Plan and West Perth Procedure, individuals requiring service animals are permitted to be accompanied by a service animal at the voter assistance centre.

Election Officials

At the Voter assistance centre, upon request, Election Officials are available to assist any voter who requires assistance in casting their traditional paper ballot or online ballot. All individuals working in the capacity of an Election Official are formally appointed as such and administered an oath of secrecy prior to voting day.

Prior to entering the voting booth, the Election Official shall, in conjunction with the elector, determine the extent to which he/she needs assistance and the best way in which this assistance can be provided. This may actually be marking the ballot as directed by the person with the disability.

Assistive Personal Equipment

Electors with disabilities may use assistive personal devices including wheelchairs, walkers, white canes, walking canes, note taking devices, portable magnifiers, recording machines, assistive listening devices, personal oxygen tanks and devices for grasping at the voting location.

Vision Loss

The Voter assistance centre will be equipped with magnifying sheets to assist an individual with low vision.

Hearing Impaired, Deafness and Hearing Loss

The Voter assistance centre will be equipped with a pad of paper and pen to communicate with electors with hearing impairments, if required.

Candidate and Registered Third Party Assistance

Candidates and scrutineers are permitted to be accompanied by a service animal at the Voter assistance centre and other designated election locations.

The Municipality will also work with candidates and/or registered third parties who require mandatory election documents, forms and materials in an alternate format.

In accordance with section 88.20 (8) of the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*, expenses directly related to an individual's disability which would not have been incurred if not for the election, are not subject to the spending limit if they are incurred by a candidate or a registered third party who is an individual with a disability.

Election Official Training

The Municipality of West Perth will make every effort to utilize Municipality resources, including staff, to be Election Officials. As a requirement under the AODA, all staff members have taken accessibility training, including accessible customer service.

For any additional Election staff that need to be recruited, part of the onboarding process will be the completion of accessibility training including customer service, the Human Rights Code and the AODA, and an overview of the Integrated Accessibility Standard Regulations.

Communication

The 2022 Municipal and School Board Election Accessibility Plan will be made available at the Municipal Office, 160 Wellington Street, Mitchell, ON and by way of the Municipality of West Perth's website www.westperth.com Alternative formats

will be made available upon request. The Plan will also be provided to all registered Candidates to assist with communicating supports to electors.

Election Materials

The Municipality of West Perth is required, as per the accessible Customer Service Standard, to provide a copy of a document to a person with a disability, or the information contained in the document, in a format that takes into account the person's disability.

Alternative Formats

Alternative formats are other ways of publishing information besides regular print. Some of these formats can be used by everyone while others are designed to address the specific needs of a user.

The Municipality of West Perth and the person with a disability may agree upon the format to be used for the document or information.

General Election Materials

Large Print: Printed material generated by the Municipality of West Perth can be made available in a font (print) size that is 16 to 20 points larger.

Website: Information generated by the Municipality of West Perth on the website in relation to the election will be compliant with WCAG 2.0 Level AA and allow for assistive software to be utilized. In addition, website font can be adjusted within the browser's functionality to aid the user in reading the information.

Service Disruptions

From time to time and/or for unforeseen circumstances beyond the Municipality of West Perth's control, temporary service disruptions may be experienced. In the event of a temporary accessible service disruption, Election Officials will commit to making reasonable efforts to ensure that services are reinstated as quickly as possible and that alternative services are provided where feasible.

In these instances of service disruptions, the Municipality of West Perth shall provide reasonable notice in the event of a planned or unexpected disruption in the facilities or services usually used by persons with disabilities.

Notice of these temporary disruptions shall be provided in a conspicuous place and manner at the respective location(s) and information shall also be posted on the Municipality of West Perth website. This notice shall include information about the reason for the disruption, its anticipated duration, and a description of alternative facilities or services, if available.

Accessible services in relation to this plan include the voter assistance centre, election materials and/or voting provisions for Electors with disabilities.

In the event of disruptions to service or unforeseen circumstances that affect the accessibility during the advance vote or on Election Day, notices of disruption will be posted in real time on the Municipality of West Perth's website.

Candidates

Candidates must also have regard to the needs of electors with disabilities. Campaign offices, election materials and canvassing should all be reviewed in order to ensure that they are fully accessible. The Accessibility Directorate of Ontario has released several quick reference documents to assist candidates with accessible elections considerations:

- Count Us In: Removing Barriers to Political Participation - Quick Reference Guide to Accessible Campaign Information and Communication
- Count Us In: Removing Barriers to Political Participation - Quick Reference Guide to Accessible Constituency, Riding Association, Central Party and Campaign Offices
- Count Us In: Removing Barriers to Political Participation - Quick Reference Guide to Accessible All Candidates Meetings

Reporting

Pursuant to Section 12.1 of *the Municipal Elections Act, 1996*, within ninety (90) days after voting day, the Municipality of West Perth Clerk shall submit a report to Council about the identification, removal and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities.